



Marriage

The Making & Living of it

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Preface

One of the characteristics of modern life seems to be a breakdown of family life, the foundation of which is a happy and healthy marriage. This has vast implications on individuals and society in terms of hardship, lack of social concern and responsibility and a culture that promotes selfishness and self-satisfaction at all costs. This vicious circle propagates more destruction of marriages and the sad story grows.

Having counseled many couples, over the years, some successfully and others not so, I have come to the conclusion that eventual success of a marriage lies in the hands (and wills) of the partners alone. Nobody can make or break a marriage if the two partners don't want that to happen.

This short booklet is an attempt to share my learning and understanding of the main issues in a marriage and a look at what it takes to make a marriage a source of great joy and fulfillment in this life. I hope that those who read it will benefit from it and will live happy, productive and satisfactory lives. The book is focused at Muslims but others can also benefit.

Mirza Yawar Baig

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Marriage in Islam

All praise be to Allahﷻ the Rabb of the Universe. Peace and blessings be on His Messenger Muhammadﷺ, his family and companions. Thereafter, Allahﷻ said:

Sura Rum: 21 And among His signs is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind. So that you might find contentment (sukoon) with them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you: in this, behold, there are signs (messages) indeed for people who reflect (think!)

As I am sure you are aware, marriage in Islam is a legal contract. It is a contract between two people in the presence of witnesses the Best of whom is Allahﷻ Himself before whom this contract is made and to whom the ones making the contract will be accountable. It is therefore essential that they understand what they are contracting to do. I recited before you an ayah (a verse) from the Qur'an where Allahﷻ speaks about the institution of marriage, calls it one of His signs and mentions specifically three special features about this institution. He uses three critical words in this ayah:

The first word Allahﷻ used is the word Sukoon.

Allahﷻ said: And among his signs is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind so that you may find Sukoon with them. So what is Sukoon? It is a word that we use in Urdu as well so I am sure all my friends who understand Urdu have an idea about its meaning. In Arabic Sukoon is the opposite of Al –

Haraka - or movement. In Arabic grammar the equivalent of the maatra on the letter is called Al-Haraka which tells us how the letter "moves" meaning, how it is to be pronounced. When there is a Sukoon on the letter it means that the letter remains as it is and will not move and will be pronounced in its original form.

Allahﷻ has used the term Sukoon as the first purpose of the marriage. He said that He creates mates for us so that we may find Sukoon with them. So that we may find contentment with them. The first condition of the contract is that the spouses are undertaking to promise that they will henceforth lead their lives in such a way that they will make their companionship, their home, their being together and their support for one another a source of contentment and Sukoon for each other. They are making Allahﷻ a witness that henceforth they will not look elsewhere other than towards each other for all the requirements of marriage.

That their eyes, ears, hearts, hands, feet will not stray away from their spouse. That there will be no Haraka, no movement away from the spouse. I ask Allahﷻ to give them and all those who are here in this gathering, Sukoon with their spouses. It also means that both will make an effort to create a home which is a place of Sukoon which they look forward to returning to after having been away from it for various reasons.

The second word that Allahﷻ has used in this ayah is: Al-Mawaddah: where He said: Wa ja'ala bainakum mawaddah: And He puts love between you. This refers to the love that the spouses feel for one another. This love is both physical and

emotional. Love is an outcome of respect. We can't love someone for whom we feel no respect. It is essential therefore for the spouses to pay attention to the good from each other and to forgive the mistakes. The spouses are like mirrors to each other. They reflect what they see but they have selective memory. When a new image comes before the mirror it is reflected with reference to the good from earlier images, whatever it was. Someone sent me a story which talked about writing the good about our friends in stone and writing their mistakes in the dust. One remains for a long time while the other is blown away by the first breeze that comes.

I believe this is the single most important secret of a good marriage. To have this selective memory for the good and selective amnesia for the bad. Unfortunately many people have the opposite which is the root cause of all problems. The good is taken for granted as one's right. While any mistake is seen as a premeditated crime and treated accordingly. Islam advises the opposite. To forgive not once but 70 times, without reservation.

For the spouse, his or her companion is their best friend. The marriage is a contract where the spouses are undertaking to make each other, their best friends from this day on. It is important to remember however that friendship is only as good as the amount of investment you make in it. It is not magic. It is not automatic. It does not happen. It is made. Consciously. With effort. And the results are directly proportional to the investment.

It is necessary to spend time with your spouse, not with your other friends in some club. It is necessary to develop common interests. It is necessary to take pleasure in each other's work and activity. It is necessary to support each other in all that is good. It is necessary to ensure that you give feedback with care and concern and never in public. It is essential to remember that between spouses there are no defenses because there is trust. And for that reason it is essential for the spouses to exercise special care in dealing with each other's emotions. It is necessary to build a language together, a language of looks, words, signs.

A language that over time becomes almost magical in how it enables one spouse to know what the other is feeling without explanation. A language which is a joy to see when you look at those who have been happily married for many years. It is necessary to consciously remember the good that one spouse does for the other, especially when they are having a bad day and are acting strange. This is the love that Allahﷻ talks about when He says that He has put it between the spouses. Like all potential wealth, it has to be accessed or it will remain buried under the sand.

The last word that Allahﷻ used in the ayah is Rahma: Mercy; when He said: Wa ja'ala bainakum mawadaatawn wa Rahma. Rahma is a special quality of Allahﷻ Himself. It is the mercy that He shows to His creation even when they don't deserve it.

He used this word to describe the relationship between the spouses in the marriage. We are merciful to those who we feel responsible for. We are merciful to our children whereas we

may not exercise the same mercy for strange children. However when you are the teacher in a school the same children become your wards and you are merciful to them. The word Rahma in the context of marriage draws our attention to the responsibility that the spouses have for one another. It also draws attention to the fact that over the years each has made a lifetime's investment in the other. To show Rahma – to be merciful – is to honor that investment and to thank the other for making it. Not to take this for granted. Rahma is also the quality when for reasons of life and destiny, when one of the spouses is unable to look after the other or to satisfy them, the other still treats him or her with love and respect and mercy. Rahma is to give without asking for return. To give because there is a pleasure in the giving itself.

Marriage in Islam is therefore a commitment made to each other, of integrity, love, respect and mercy that the spouses are undertaking to make to each other in the presence of Allahﷻ who is Witness to all our thoughts, intentions and actions.

I ask Allahﷻ to bless this union, to fill the lives of these young people with His Mercy and to make them standard bearers of Islam in every sense of the term so that when they stand before Him on the Day when all of us will stand before Him, He will be pleased with them.

I ask the same dua for all of us.

Marriage

The making of it

Critical Requirements of Marriage

Hadith Al-Bukhari - Narrated Abu Hurairah: The Prophet said, "A woman is married for four things, i.e., her wealth, her family status, her beauty and her religion. So you should marry the religious woman (otherwise) you will be a loser.

Many of my young friends who are now getting ready to commit matrimony are asking me for advice about selecting a spouse. My advice is common to both men and women. So here goes with the 6 – critical requirements:

1. **Islam:** As Rasoolullah ﷺ said in the hadith above a woman is married for four things but her religion is the most important. The same applies to the men. So the first thing to look for is whether your prospective spouse is observant of at least the basics of Islam. These would be the following:

Religion: Salah, fasting, charity (ask about this), Qur'an (can they at least read it fluently? It is a shame that grown up men and women ready to get married can't even read the Qur'an fluently and correctly with Tajweed.)

Character: Courage, patience, a sense of honor (gheera), confidence, presence, manliness (in men), shyness (in women) modesty (in both), composure, a sense of peace and harmony, comfort with silence, not talking incessantly, dignity.

Appearance: Hijaab for the women and beards for the men. You don't want to marry an effeminate man who looks like a woman. It is confusing. Style (there's nothing endearing about looking like something the cat threw up). Most men end up looking like their fathers and most women like their mothers. So take a good look at the father and mother and decide; because that is who you are going to be looking at every morning.

Caveat: If he/she does not care about what Allah ﷻ said, they are not going to care about what you say. Also in a tight spot, if they have Taqwa, it is that which will come to their aid and help to resolve the situation. If it is not there to begin with then there's a major problem. Finally in a conflict, it is the Qur'an and Hadith that is your final refuge. If they don't consider that to be important, then you will be up the creek without a paddle. Their beauty will wear out in a few months (you will stop noticing it) and their wealth is not yours anyway. This person will be the one who will assist you in bringing up your children and these children will be the source of your Jannah or your Jahannam. So if you have someone who is not committed to her/his Deen then you are sunk, no matter how cute they look. So run away, fast. This is critical. Stop reading this right now because if this is not there, the rest of it doesn't matter.

2. **Forget falling in love:** Falling is never a good thing. Love as we know it (from our romantic notions) is simply another word for physical attraction. It lasts usually for 2 weeks. Since you want your marriage to last a bit longer

than that, it is a good idea to focus on respect which will grow into love. Not falling into but growing into. What does that mean? It means that 25 years after you have been married every time you look at your spouse you fall in love all over again. Growing in love means evolving a common language of looks, signals and words that only you two can understand. It is almost magical to see it work. I wish it for all those who read this. That is heaven on earth. So it is respect, honor and dignity that result in love. This love is where your spouse will stand up for you and defend you, never laugh at you in public, be considerate of your faults and hide them and be focused on the many good things that you bring to the marriage. This love means that she/he will not complain about the difficulties that may happen along the way but will work with you to overcome them and stand in the night and cry before Allah ﷻ and ask for His intervention. This is the person who will never leave your side as long as you live and will pray for your forgiveness when you are gone. In my experience this is the only person who you can rely on to do it, for all others will forget after a while.

3. **Manners:** If their religion is good, then watch how they treat their servants, parents, other siblings. Watch how they speak to the waiters in the restaurants, drivers and other service people. Do they show kindness and concern for others? Do they have compassion? Do they show respect for others? Table manners are very important as well. Do they say 'Thank you or Jazakallah' and 'Sorry'? Do they smile

often or do they look like you will have to take them to the dentist to see their teeth. Do they laugh? What kind of jokes do they make?

Caveat: I know what you are thinking; if their religion is good then their Akhlaaq must automatically be good. But you know as well as I do that today, this can't be taken for granted. Manners are critical because the day after your honeymoon you are going to be at the receiving end of them. So you'd better make sure you like what you are about to receive. Kindness, concern, compassion and a sense of humor are worth their weight in gold. They are what will make your marriage and your home a heaven on earth.

4. **Conversation:** What do they talk about? Airheads are of all types, genders and without blond hair and will drive you insane; unless of course you are one of them. Listen to them more than you talk because you are doing the assessment. Look for a breath of knowledge, depth of perception, structured thinking and overall understanding of situations. Ask what they read; authors, books and topics. See if they are more critical than forgiving; do they look for faults more than look for excuses for those faults; do they talk more about problems or about solutions? Do they talk more about material stuff or about the Aakhira? When they talk about religion are they more critical of others or more focused on their own conduct, shortcomings and need for change? Do they sound like they are dogmatic and bigoted and overly sold on this or that Jamat and critical of all others? In other

words are they focused more towards commonalities with others or differences; are they more towards dividing or bringing people together?

Caveat: Conversation is the lifeblood of a marriage. Without it you have nothing. Most couples stop talking to one another less than six months into the marriage. Make sure you are not one of them and for that you need someone you can talk to, share interests with, respect, are interested in and who you can learn something from. Without conversation your marriage won't go too far.

5. **Common Life Goal:** Look for commonalities in interests, life goal and passions (especially if you are passionate about something). You are going to live together for the next 20-30 years and so you'd better be focused in generally the same direction. Otherwise you are going to spend a lot of time alone or end up fighting.

Caveat: You need support in your life goal; whether it is to change the world or to bring up children (it is the same thing, believe me). You need someone who will share your pain and joy, give you ideas and listen to you with interest. You need someone who doesn't run your life goal down as being unimportant. You need someone who has a life goal that inspires you to invest your time, energy, emotion and thought in. Serious long term pursuits are the secret of happy marriages. Not kitty parties, boys nights out and the bowling alley.

6. **The Family:** Look at the whole family; their Aqeeda, religious practice, culture, habits, lifestyle, norms, and customs. Can you live with them? Some Aqeeda issues are completely incompatible, e.g. families that are into grave worship and dargahs. Other issues may not be totally incompatible but still difficult to live with, e.g. issues to do with purdah, seriousness about Salah and so on.

Caveat: I know you did not marry the whole family but believe me, especially in our (Middle East, Subcontinent) cultures the family is very much a part of the equation. So if you don't want to spend the rest of your life fighting to keep your wife or husband on the right track, then you'd better make sure the family is on the same track as you are. The same goes for their lifestyle, manners, food habits, things they give importance to and so on. It is not necessary to have a replica of your own home, but the degree to which there is a difference to that degree you will have to adjust and change. Remember that all change is painful and so the less you have, the happier you will be.

- If you marry into a joint family and have to live with your husband's (or in rare cases) with the wife's family then the degree of adjustment will be far more. I am not saying that you should not marry into a joint family but if you do, please do it with your eyes wide open and a big heart, a thick skin, lots of patience and willingness to change yourself and adjust with people. Otherwise you are headed for sublime torture which will kill your

marriage sooner or later. Living in a joint family can be very trying in the here & now but can be very rewarding when you grow old. So keep your eye on the future and accept the present as the price for not being lonely in your old age and dying alone in an old age home. If you still don't think you can take it, then don't marry into a joint family.

- Joint families mean a lot of support especially in the upbringing of children as well as in a whole gamut of situations. But it also means that others will have an opinion about you and will 'interfere' with your life. Whether you see that 'interference' as concern or as being 'nosey' is up to you. Both have consequences. Leaving the family to live on your own may not be an option at all or may be possible only with major heartburn on all sides leaving bruised egos, emotions and relationships. Not something that you will enjoy and so something much to be avoided if possible.

Final Words of Caution:

1. A word of caution for those intrepid souls who believe they can change others. Allah ﷻ kept Hidaya in His Hand. Maybe you can change people and if so all power to you. But more likely you are like 99.9% of the world which only believes that it can change people. Anyone who looks at someone before they marry them and say, 'I will change him/her and then they'll be just fine'; is taking their life into their hands,

quite literally. If the person you want to marry needs changing, let someone else do it. You leave them alone and go find someone who you can admire and look up to and want to be like.

2. Marrying someone by looking at a profile on the internet is like playing Russian roulette: One of the chambers will have a bullet in it. It is a gamble which I would seriously advise you not to take with your life. I have seen too many ruined. If you don't know enough about your spouse don't marry them. Islam permits you to make enquiries and to meet the spouse before marriage along with your Mahram to ensure that you find out enough about them. All that I have mentioned above can be ascertained in one or two meetings if you know what you are looking for and keep your eyes open. Make sure you do that.

Finally let's not forget; look at all that I have mentioned above and ask yourself, 'How much do I fit into this myself? How many of the criteria do I meet? Am I likely to be a good spouse for the person I marry?' Take marriage seriously because happy marriages are made by serious people. Take it seriously because after all it is your life that we are talking about.

Marriage

Living it

How to keep the marriage happy

Now that you are married, let us look at how to make your marriage happy. Someone asked me 20 questions about it. Here are the answers, which I hope cover all aspects of this matter.

1. What are the characteristics of a happy marriage?

Truth, Caring, Mutual respect are what I call my three Cardinal Principles of happy marriages. Please notice that I am not using the word 'love'. Love comes out of these three things. What is called love is usually physical desire. The shape or size of someone's body is not the inspiration for love; it can be the inspiration for infatuation and lust but not love. For love to happen, the lasting kind that is, the kind that grows with age and the longer you spend time together, you need truthfulness, caring and concern for one another – putting the needs of the other before your own; and mutual respect. Without respect there can't be any love. One needs to respect one's spouse, appreciate their strengths, make them your role model, icon and be proud of them and proud that they are your spouse. That kindles love in the heart which grows with time because the reasons for respect also grow with time. Physical attraction reduces with age. It is programmed to do so. Nobody grows more beautiful with age. You mature with age, grow wiser, more mellow, more patient and forbearing and more worthy of respect. The love that comes out of that also grows with age.

Truth is to express feelings as they are and not to have any pretensions. Caring is to treat the other with concern

because you know that with you s/he has no barriers or safety nets. Respect is to acknowledge the value of the trust that is placed in you in allowing you into that inner most of places in the heart in which nobody else has been allowed before. To treat that privilege with the respect it deserves and never to abuse it for any reason.

2. Is there a formula to be happy in a marriage?

Marry someone you believe is worthy of emulation; someone you can look up to and learn to forgive them. The formula of an unhappy marriage is to marry someone who you believe you can change. That is a sure recipe for disaster. When you marry someone who you think needs to be changed you are accepting that they are not good enough as it is. Also in most cases you would not have asked them if they want to change and that too to your preferred model. And then you will lo and behold that they have other ideas about changing and your marriage will be the casualty.

The second part of the formula is to be forgiving. We need to forgive one another. What tends to happen in many marriages is that we expect the other person to forgive us but we hold them to standards that we are ourselves unable to live up to and become curiously blind to this unreasonable stance. That doesn't work. Good to remember the saying, 'Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.'

Share in each other's lives. Take interest in what the other does. Don't be nosey but learn and add value. Conversation is both the key to a happy marriage and a metre to judge its health.

Marriages that are getting sick start to lose conversation. When there is nothing left to talk about after 10 minutes and when your idea of spending time with your spouse is to sit in front of the TV or to read the newspaper in the same room, then you can safely say that your marriage is falling sick. In happy marriages there is a desire for the company of the other. Not for the company of others. You hurry home because your spouse is there. You don't hit home and bounce off to the club to sit with your cronies or to some other place to be with other friends. You want to spend time with your spouse not because otherwise s/he will complain but because you genuinely want to do it.

3. How do you make a marriage work?

By working at it. We use this term, 'Make a marriage work', but we forget that a lot of it is actually 'work'. It takes effort, time and energy, is measurable and produces results. Making breakfast for your wife is work. Offering to do her errands is work. Taking the trouble to look nice when your husband comes home instead of like animated laundry is work. Going to the airport to meet his flight is work. You get the drift? Doing what does not come naturally or doing something that is important for the other even if you don't like doing it, is work. And all of it produces results in terms of appreciation and love.

Never complain if your spouse is not spending time with you. Firstly it is pathetic and undignified to do so. Secondly I have a rule: never tell someone to do for duty what they won't do for love. And thirdly, that they seek someone else's company is a message for you; so act and examine yourself and see why this is happening and correct yourself and things will change.

People seek what is enjoyable. So if your company is more a pain rather than enjoyment, naturally they will go elsewhere.

As I say, 'If I wanted to marry a nag, I would have married a horse. At least it would have carried me from place to place.' Nag is a gender neutral term. There are male and female nags and both are equally painful. As I've said earlier conversation is a good indicator about what is happening to the marriage. Giving instructions, complaining, informing and gossiping is not conversation. Sharing of thoughts, hopes, aspirations, fears; good listening, compassion, understanding, laughing and crying together about issues that are shared; that is what I mean. Finally companionable silence is also an indicator of a good marriage. You don't have to be talking all the time. It is the quality of the companionship, the quality of the silence. You will know it without anyone having to explain, let me assure you. But pay attention to it if there is tension or boredom in it. The key is to want to share, time, thoughts, aspirations, fears and to want to listen to each other with caring and respect.

Do senseless acts of kindness

Give gifts, flowers, sweets. Not on birthdays and anniversaries – that is mechanical and with Outlook and smartphones you don't even have to remember. The machine reminds you. Give gifts all through the year. It does not have to be big always – though sometimes it must be – but it is the thought that counts. Rasoolullah ﷺ said that gifts increase affection for one another and indeed they do. So give gifts to each other. Remember to do this especially if you have been traveling or away mentally with

work for a while. Gifts are the adhesive of a good marriage. The key to remember in all this is that it must be something that you are sharing with your spouse alone. Gift wrap the article, tie a ribbon, put perfume on it, announce it with flowers – use your imagination to make it special. Remember it is not about the article. It is about creating memories. Her gift is not one you pull out of a sack of gifts for the whole family. It is something that only she gets. It is something she gets when there is no reason for it. It is something that she got when nobody else did. It is the exclusivity of it that gives the message, 'You are special.' And that applies to the man as well. Remember, men also like gifts, even more than women. So give it to him with an open heart.

Playing

Couples that play together, stay together – says the proverb. Games, entertainment, sightseeing, holidays, picnics – you think of what play means to you and do it. Whatever fun-thing you enjoy doing together, do it. And do it regularly. If you play a competitive sport together – say golf – remember to lose regularly. It is not for the competition that you are playing and to make it a competition is to defeat its very purpose. Remember that sometimes you may not be enjoying it equally but that is worth the pleasure of seeing the smile on the face of your spouse. It's all about that smile anyway. Be genuine. A cosmetic smile is detectable a mile away. Performance is not the key everywhere and one place where it is not, is in a marriage. The 'Performance Appraisal' for a marriage is a joint statement which spells the success of the marriage, not of your personal performance. Otherwise it will be like saying, 'Operation

successful but the patient died.' In our fast paced lives today, we don't seem to have the time to simply, 'be'. We are conditioned to look for 'results' for everything. This is highly stressful and detrimental to a marriage. A marriage is for sukoon, tranquility, harmony, peace and many times that translates to – just being together without any 'result'.

4. How can you try and make an unhappy marriage a happy one?

This is a tough one because there is a pre-clause to it. Once you satisfy that pre-clause then it is very easy. The pre-clause is, 'DO YOU REALLY WANT IT TO HAPPEN?' Now that may sound like a strange thing to ask but I have seen in many years of counseling that all the failures that I saw were because the partners did not really want to make it work. They were not sincere and were merely going through the moves with the idea of satisfying themselves or others that 'they made the effort'. Now that is a lie because they never made an effort. They acted a drama with a precluded ending.

Once you are sincere about turning things around then you need to sit down and write down all that you like about your spouse. After all there were things about them that you liked enough to marry them. What were they? Then when you have that list, you write down the problem areas. Usually that works like magic. Marriages go bad most often because we don't appreciate the good enough and are not thankful for what they have. I often ask couples, 'How many times a day do you thank your wife/husband? How many times a day do you hug or kiss them? How many times a day do you tell them that you love

them?' It is amazing how much we take appreciation for granted. For most people not criticizing is equal to appreciating. It is not. Expressing genuine appreciation is all about being thankful to the other person for all that they have done for you. Rasoolullah ﷺ said, 'The one who has not thanked the person has not thanked Allah ﷻ.' Thankfulness clearly expressed and often is the lifeblood of a good marriage. And remember, to do it often is the key. After all when things are not going badly, we don't hesitate to make it known. So why not when they are going well?

5. Is the idea of a soul mate just a myth – or is it simple communication between people?

Soul mates are made, not born. And they are made over time. Sometimes a fairly long time. Then you see them sitting together and smiling at things that only they understand. Or looks that have meaning only for each other. Or speaking in a language that only the other understands. Phrases that they use only for each other and which may even be gibberish to others but which touch their hearts. This is the stage when every time you look at her you fall in love all over again, 30 years into your marriage. And laughing. Laughing is important. Laughing together at the same things. Showing each other things so as to add to the joy by sharing.

6. What kind of initiatives and actions dictate a happy marriage?

Back to the basics: Truth, caring, mutual respect. Every action or initiative must pass this test. Are you being truthful? Is her need coming before your own? And are you showing the respect you

feel? I remember that my grandmother used to serve my grandfather his meals. Every meal. She would put food on his plate, refill it, offer him the choicest pieces of meat, watch to see what he needed and give it to him before he asked for it. She would eat every meal with him, without exception in a house that was a mansion with several servants. But no servant was ever allowed to give my grandfather anything directly. They brought the tray to my grandmother and she served him. All this she did with such a look of love and devotion on her face that I can see clearly in my mind even today 40 years later and more than 25 years since both of them died. Why did she do this? Just because she liked to do it. It really is that simple.

He reciprocated this to the fullest extent. He never did anything without asking for her advice. He never went anywhere without her. He wore what she gave him. She had complete control of his money. He never touched it. He never asked her for any account with a level of trust seldom seen today, even though it was his money, so to speak. He never raised his voice to her for anything. He never even looked at her except with love. She was his whole life in every sense of the word.

He loved her and she loved him and it showed.

She died first. He died three months later of a broken heart. But they left memories for their children and grandchildren about how to be married and how to treat your spouse.

7. How much involvement should parents and in laws have in a marriage?

None whatsoever. This is the single most potent recipe for disaster. Parents should be involved in their own marriages. Once your children are married, they are not children any more. Leave them alone and let them work out their problems. They are adults and that is why they got married. The problem with many parents (in this case mothers) especially in our society (Indian) is that they are most anxious about getting their children married and then they start feeling insignificant and so become competitors with their own daughters in law. Remember that if you become your daughter in law's competitor, you lose if you lose and you lose if you win. Both ways you lose. So get out of the way. Leave them alone. Visit them for 2 days, not more, every six months – every year is even better. Don't talk for more than 5 minutes on the phone. Don't chat on Skype or Yahoo or anything else. Don't ask personal questions. And above all, don't ask, 'Are you happy?' I have yet to see a marriage survive the attention of parents and parents in law.

At the same time I would advise young couples also to take steps to kindly discourage this involvement if you see it happening. If you are old enough to get married you are old enough to solve your own problems. If you are running to your parents with your problems then put on your diapers. You are not ready for marriage. So if your Mom calls and asks you, 'So what did he say when you told him such and such?' Tell your Mom, 'Mom, sorry I won't tell you what he told me.' Smile and say it but say it clearly. Spend time with your spouse. I am not asking you to neglect your mother or father but remember that

your spouse has first call once you get married. The key is to realize that these are independent relationships and need to be managed. The same is true of children when they come along. I have seen spouses becoming strangers to each other because the children take up the time and energy of both to such an extent. Maturity is to be able to manage these multiple relationships in the marriage.

While on this subject let me also talk about arranged marriages which are still quite common in our society. Is it a good thing to arrange a marriage? Or to try to arrange one, to be more precise? I believe it is for a one big reason: Compatibility.

Especially if you are going to live in a joint family then it is a good thing to marry someone that everyone (at least the important ones – parents, siblings and their spouses) accept and like. Also someone who is from background similar to your own. Marriage is all about adjustment and while it is true that all adjustments can be made, it is equally true that the less you have to make, the happier you will be. So like the Holiday Inn, if your new room looks like the old one, you will have less to adjust with. Never fear, no matter how similar the backgrounds, there will still be plenty you will need to adjust to, so it makes sense to reduce that to the extent possible.

Beyond this, it is not productive for parents and family to get involved in arranging marriages. Putting pressure on the children to marry this one or that is truly idiotic which you invariably discover most painfully later to everyone's detriment and grief. Introduce them and leave them alone. If they decide

to go ahead, all for the good. If they decide they don't want to, all for the better. Introducing is a good idea because in the screening leading to the introduction you, the parents, can satisfy yourself about the background and culture.

It is essential to leave the prospective couple alone to make up their own minds because no matter how much the backgrounds match, no matter that his or her parents are your childhood friends, the fact of the matter is that these two are individuals in their own right, with their own likes and dislikes, their own views on life and they need to make up their own minds and take ownership for their decision. If you interfere in your own anxiety about this 'great match' then you will actually impede this process. 'Obedient' sons or daughters, who in true Bollywood style say to their parents, 'I will marry whoever you choose,' should be sent back to their nursery to grow up until they can learn to make up their minds about what is perhaps the most important decision that they will ever make in their lives. If you don't do this, then be prepared for this same 'obedient' one to remind you that you are responsible for the disaster that they are now presenting you with – divorce papers. In my view, anyone who is not prepared to decide who they want to marry and to take responsibility for that decision is not ready to get married. Let them wait until they are ready instead of ruining someone else's life with their confusion.

8. How does one make compromises?

They are not called 'compromises'. They are called 'adjustments'. It is not the semantics of it but the attitudes that language indicates and dictates. We make compromises when

forced to do so. We make adjustments to things so that we can enjoy them more. One of the things that most young couples don't bargain for is the aspects of sharing ownership, time and privacy that marriage brings with it. Nobody told them about it and they didn't think about it when they had stars in their eyes. Honeymoons are in hotels and sharing a hotel room is different from sharing your own bedroom and your own cupboard. Changing from 'I' to 'We' is often a difficult process. Small things can become the cause of friction, sometimes degenerating to serious conflict.

Some people are neat and orderly by nature. To others any form of 'order' is an 'attack' on their freedom, individuality and free spirit. Some people are early risers and early sleepers. Others like to stay up late and wake up when the sun is well up in the sky. Some eat breakfast, others don't. Some are more stylish and fashion conscious than others. Others carry their what-the-dog-left-on-the-doorstep look as a mark of their individuality much to the disgust of their spouse. Some people like surprises, others hate them. Some like to take decisions, even bad ones. Others like to leave options open for as long as they can get away with. For some the idea of relaxation is to be alone or with the one they love, all by themselves, sitting often in companionable silence. For others relaxation is to have at least five other people in the fray while managing or two others on the phone. Some people love parties, especially where they are likely to meet new people. Others hate parties, especially where they are likely to meet new people. Some focus on the rules, regulations, systems of things. Others see the same things in terms of feelings and

emotion. All this would have been fine if difference was seen as merely different. But it isn't it is seen as 'right' (my way) and 'wrong' (any other way). This conditioning is culturally universal and ingrained. We all have it.

Many of these are temperament traits, which those who are familiar with Myers-Briggs Type Theory will recognize. Irrespective of your familiarity with the theory I am sure you will recognize yourselves, your spouses, family and friends in these descriptions. The question is, what should you do about the fact that you may discover after marrying someone that you married someone very different from yourself. We seem to know instinctively that difference means problems and so we unconsciously play down our differences before marriage. We try to be very accommodative, forgiving and adjust to almost anything. Unfortunately this lasts for all of two weeks into the marriage. Then the reality of difference kicks in. And 'kicks' is the right way to describe it. Difference in a marriage is far from intellectual. It is real, in the face and with you every day. You have to deal with it or it will create trouble. It is interesting to note that in many cases people actually marry others because the different temperament seems so attractive from the outside. For the one who leaves things open as long as they can, the strong decisive nature of the spouse is the essence of manhood. For the one who is sedate, orderly and structured, the spontaneous, effervescent spirit of the spouse is like a breath of fresh air. Sadly in both and all similar cases, this does not last long. Then the difference becomes a source of irritation, aggravation and conflict.

Happily there is a solution and that is to understand difference to be difference and to consciously refuse to see it as good and bad. Then to ensure that you don't criticize your spouse's different way of being or doing as long as it is not illegal, immoral or likely to drag your good name in the mud. As long as it will not land you or her/him in jail, leave it alone. Let them live the way they like to. Learn to ignore and learn not to engage or comment on or react to everything.

Having said that, decide on what is important to you. Don't make compromises on issues of principle. Explain to your spouse why you won't compromise and wise partners will respect that. But issues which are important to the other and which you can live with changing, change. Remember the point about concern for the other? It is good to remember that everything is not a test of your masculinity or femininity. By 'giving in' to something you don't lose face; you win hearts. So do it unless it is something that goes against your fundamental values. At this point let me remind you that marrying someone with a different Aqeeda, religious perspective or religion is almost always a recipe for disaster except for people who are not committed to their own religion. If you are committed to your faith then ensure that you marry someone who is equally committed and has the same perspective about it as you do.

It is a very good idea to have some frank sharing of thoughts on what is important to you. When this is happening, simply listen. Don't justify, agree, disagree or argue. Just listen respectfully and then decide what you love, what you can live with, what you can change in yourself and what you need to talk to the

other person about. Most couples, in the courtship stage are too busy on appearing their best and get into a pretense mode that has no relation to what they are really like. Acting can't be sustained and the mask comes off sooner than later with predictable results. So speak to each other frankly and then decide if you want to get married. During this conversation speak clearly and tell them what are the non-negotiables for you. Don't try to be politically correct or polite or whatever and hide or play down things that you really feel strongly about.

Maybe it is something to do with practicing your religious beliefs, or about family values or that your Mom will live with you or that the cat shares your bed or whatever. No matter what it is, if it is important, then say it. That is far more positive and far less painful than having your spouse discover it later. Some things may seem 'silly' to you but if they are important enough for the other person then they will cause you serious trouble if you don't respect them.

9. When does one know that a marriage is not working? And when should people do something about it?

A marriage is ultimately an agreement between two people to live together for mutual benefit. When you find that there is no mutual benefit and that the living together is causing more grief than joy then you know that it is not working. Then you must ask yourself the questions:

- Am I willing to make it work?
- What will it take to make it work?
- Am I willing to do what it takes?

If the answer to all of them is in the affirmative, then get on with it and work. If not then it is time to call it a day. The important thing to do even if you decide to divorce is to remember the first three rules: Truthfulness, concern for the other and mutual respect. Ensure that you don't do anything that is not scrupulously honest and completely above board. Show concern that the other person should not leave with bad feeling. The divorce is bad enough. Don't add negative baggage to it. And show respect for each other. You deserve it and your marriage deserves it. Part company if you have to but do it in a way that is respectful and honorable.

10. What are the Core Responsibilities of the spouses? Are they different for the man and woman?

In my view it is the Core Responsibility of the man to work and earn a living and take care of the financial responsibilities of the family. It is Core Responsibility of the woman to make the home a place of beauty, grace and harmony and to focus on the upbringing of the children. I know this may sound old fashioned to some but just take a look at what the result of the Yuppie and Puppy culture is and you will come back to the basics soon enough. Having taken care of the Core Responsibility, naturally the man must help around the home, take care of children, water the garden, wash the car, mow the lawn, take out the garbage and not sit in front of the TV with his feet propped up and a bowl of popcorn at his elbow – or whatever passes as its equivalent in your culture.

Similarly once the Mom has taken care of her Core Responsibility then it is good if she waters the garden, washes

the car, mows the lawn, takes out the garbage and does not sit in front of the TV with her feet propped up and a bowl of popcorn at her elbow – or whatever passes as its equivalent in your culture. I am sure you understand what I mean. Dividing responsibilities is a very good idea. Do it whichever way you like but do it. Role clarity is essential in a happy marriage and role conflict causes the maximum stress on it. It is essential for one of the spouses to be dedicated to the upbringing of children; teaching them life skills, manners, tools of thinking, decision making and teaching them core values of life. Today in the Yuppie and Puppy cultures the idea of bringing up children is to feed them, ensure that they are washed and dried and entertained. This thinking is the root of all evil. Food, a dry bed and toys is what your dog needs, not your child.

Children need a jolly sight more than food, clothing and shelter if you want to develop a human being who will be your legacy to the world. I believe you need to dedicate yourself to that because it is important. I've met many parents who struggled very hard in the early stages of their lives and who say to themselves (and to everyone else) with great feeling and tears in their eyes, "I will never allow my children to face the hardship that I had to go through." When I hear this statement I say to them, "Please change the wording. Say, 'I will never allow my children to build resilience, character and strength. I will never allow them to have the power that I have, to succeed.' Say this because in effect that is what you are really saying." For many of them this statement of mine is a shock. They had never thought about their view on upbringing of children in that light.

If you protect your child and don't allow him to enter the fray of life and compete, to get his nose bloody in the struggle, to cry with frustration in the night at his failure and then learn to dry his tears and work out new alternatives; if you allow him or her to come running to you and lend him your shoulder and box of tissues for his tears, then remember you are the worst enemy of the child. You are programming him for failure.

You are writing the script to destroy his life and to make a parasite out of him who will never have the respect of the world and will forever live in a state of mediocrity laboring under a battered sense of self-worth which in many cases comes out in the form of aggression and overpowering control on the spouse who is the only one on whom he can vent his spleen. Struggle builds strength. Opposition teaches how to fight in the struggle of life. Difficulty teaches how to win. If there was no Goliath, David would have remained a shepherd boy. Many parents don't understand this and are the architects of their children's destruction, tragically with the best of intentions.

Many parents equate expense with quality. They give their children the most expensive education which insulates them from the realities of life and so they never learn to fight the real battles. They give them the most expensive toys which in reality teach them to define human value in terms of material worth (the 'best' kids are those who have the best toys). They insulate them from poverty, deprivation, lack of resources and thereby they 'protect' them from being exposed to the power of drive, ambition, single minded focus on achieving big, ambitious, scary goals. They build walls between their children and the

people who they must in the end, deal with. People who will one day, work in their organizations and decide their fate. People who need to be inspired, led, cared for and supported. And therefore people who must be understood. Not simply in order to do good and be charitable but because the success of the business and family depends on the development of these people; the great multitude. The fond parents forget or ignore the fact that one day the time will come for the soft little molly coddled pussy cat to enter the jungle of the real world without any of the tools it needs to survive, much less to lead others.

They must be supported but not protected. They must be advised but not told what to do. They must be allowed to take their own decisions but not without the benefit of the frame of reference of the value of honor, fairness, responsibility, accountability, nurturing and trusteeship. They must be allowed to feel, to cry in the night for the hardships that others undergo, to build friendships and relationships that span the boundaries of color, race, religion, nationality and much more difficult, social order and prejudice. They must learn that to be poor and to be honorable are not mutually exclusive; just as to be rich and to be honorable are not the same thing and don't happen automatically. They must learn that virtue is a state of mind. A stance, a decision, a position that one takes, not because someone is watching but because of one's own sense of one's identity. They must be taught the value of learning and to value those who provide it. Children who are not taught respect for their teachers are deprived of the blessing of knowledge. Today

this is a prevalent disease with many of the young and ignorant. Remaining ignorant is a choice; a life threatening choice.

I do because of who I am. And I become, because I do. They must learn that our actions define us. They must learn that people will define them on the basis of both what they owned and what they contributed. But they will honor them only for what they contributed. Because we are remembered, not for what we had but for what we gave. Only when they are taught to focus on contribution from their earliest childhood will they be able to fight the force of consumerism that is focused on consumption. Blind, self-centered consumption that in the end will consume us all, if it is allowed to proliferate unchallenged. If you don't agree, use condoms. That is far better than producing children who are a nuisance at best and a painful reality in the lives of others, as long as they live.

11. **Whose responsibility is it to make a marriage happy?**

Naturally it is the responsibility of both people like in any agreement. It is important to recognize and accept this responsibility so that you will then do what it takes to fulfill it. As I mentioned above, I advocate actually sitting down and having a dialogue before you get married about what each one is supposed to do. Say it to each other and agree on it. Don't leave it to guesswork and discovery. That leads to misunderstanding and disappointment. A good marriage is a dream.

To make it come true you have to wake up and work. If you expect your wife to cook for your friends who you will bring home from time to time, say it. And also say what time to time means. If you expect your husband to pick up the food on the way home with his friends from the restaurant, say so. If you expect your wife to make breakfast for you and sit with you watching you get outside the eggs and toast, say so. If you expect your husband to bring the eggs and toast to you in bed (never really liked the idea of eating without first brushing your teeth), say so. What I mean is that in marriages, it is often the so-called 'silly things' that lead to trouble. So silly or not, say it if it is important to you.

My second Cardinal Principle – Concern, is what is most important to remember. If you apply the Golden Rule – Do unto them as you would have them do unto you – you can't go wrong. The virus that kills marriage is a two letter word – ME. To get you have to give. What you have in your hand is your harvest. What you sow is your seed. To get a harvest you have to first sow the seed. Remember that the harvest is always more than the seed. So give and give with grace, with love, with joy. And you will get much more than you bargained for. Show consideration for your spouse. Do things without being asked. Be aware of what they like the most and do it. Try to please them. Don't play power games. The marriage is not a contest to get the better of the other. You are not in a race or in a WWF wrestling match or in a competition to see who is more powerful. Remember that every time you 'win' the other person loses. And losing is something that nobody enjoys. So at some point they will get tired of losing and you have no marriage.

And that is the biggest loss that you brought on to yourself. A marriage is a relay race – long term, passing the baton to the other at each stage and the team – in this case the two of you – wins.

12. In today's times of pre-nups, fast track divorces and even websites as matchmakers, what kind of mindset should people have when getting into a marriage?

Today we live in a world where selfishness is not a sin anymore. However changing your mind about an evil does not make it good. You will get sick even if you fall in love with the virus. People wanting to get married have to learn to think about the other and to consciously give him or her precedence and preference. If you can't do this, your marriage will break down sooner or later. Our lifestyles, the internet, social networking and talking to people across the world from other cultures, the TV with its unreal, fantasy world of soap operas are all designed to destroy marriages. They promote ideas that are either directly destructive or lead to the killing fields of marriage. These serials glorify disrespect for elders, extramarital affairs, destructive competition, ostentatious consumption and generally behavior that is destructive and negative for all concerned except for those who make the serials. A good marriage is about living in the real world, not in a world that is neither bold nor beautiful.

13. Is the 7 year itch based on statistics or research? In your mind, does it exist?

I don't think there is any such thing. Looking outside your marriage for companionship which can then lead to a breakup, is a sign of intrinsic unhappiness. If you feel it, the thing to do is

to deal with it. Not look outside. The problem with 7 year itches is that every 7 years you are older and less desirable. Then where will you go?

14. How important are children to have a happy marriage, some couples cannot have children, others choose not to.

I don't think children either make a marriage happy or unhappy. It is more their upbringing that makes the home happy or not. Children give the parents a common interest but for a marriage if the only thing in common is the children then something is wrong. On the converse side children take a lot of time and attention and energy and this can be difficult to handle for many people. But if the spouses share in the work of bringing up children and take the trouble to bring them up well, with good manners, values and attitudes, then they can be a huge asset for the marriage.

15. What can couples do to keep the bespoke "spark" in the marriage?

Appreciate each other and express this appreciation on a daily basis. Catch each other doing right. Do things for one another only to see the smile on the face. Invent your own language which only the two of you understand. We used to keep a book on a table in the house in which we would write things we liked about each other or something nice we wanted to say to one another. We did say it as well but sometimes writing is easier. Give flowers and chocolates. Men also like flowers, remember. Second most important rule: Don't react to everything that the other says. Take 10 deep breaths. Then forget it. Reactions produce reactions and in the end it is taken out of your hands.

Finally never go to bed, mad at each other. Always make up before you go to bed. Cuddle up together and sleep. Never quarrel in the bedroom. Never in bed. Make this a rule. If you have a problem, deal with it in the morning. Usually by the morning it would have solved itself.

16. Is fighting healthy?

Well, depends on what is meant by 'fighting'. If it means trying to get the better of each other in an argument and using all kinds of means to do so then it is definitely not healthy. If it means arguing as in a friendly fencing match between equal intellects that leads to good feeling, then it is good. Avoid power games like the plague. Many marriages turn into daily competitions between the spouses to see who can control the other. This takes many apparently benign and legitimate forms. But they are all illegitimate, subversive and destructive to the marriage.

Some people use religion as a means of control and invoke religious rulings and promise the other brimstone and hellfire for disobeying some whim or fancy of yours. In many cases it is people (mostly men in this case) who have not done anything significant in life and are suffering from an inferiority complex and can sense that they really don't command any respect on their own, who use religion and religious rulings to enforce their will on the woman. Women use religion to compensate for their own feelings of inadequacy where they feel that they are not loved or desired as much as they would like to be. 'Should' is the most useless word in the language. If people did what they should then the world would have been a different place. Both

need to look at the real drivers behind their apparent religious orientation because it has nothing to do with the Almighty. Power games come in many packages. Spouses use children as pawns in their games at getting the better of each other. Others use health concerns, eat more, eat less, joint family rules, cultural taboos and many other things. All are power games and all are destructive.

17. How important is money to keep a marriage happy?

Not important at all. Both financial hardship and plenty can be a source of bonding or a source of drifting apart. It is mutual respect and concern for one another that counts. And that is a result of character, piety, learning, nobility of conduct and deportment, confidence, trustworthiness, dignity and grace, genuine desire to please one another and to place the need of the other before and above one's own. None of these are things that money can buy or that we need money for. Marriages are happy or break up for reasons other than money. Money problems are not money problems even when there are money problems; if you see what I mean.

18. What are the worst things couples can do to a marriage?

Lie, betray trust, cheat, play power games. Also making fun of one another as in mocking. Showing disrespect in the name of humor. Humor is to laugh with someone, not to laugh at them. Lastly but by no means the least, by being overly self-focused and showing disregard and no concern for the other. Honesty is still the best policy in 2011 and will still be the best policy in 3011 if the world lasts that long.

19. **Should people resort to white lies or tiny lies to keep the peace?**

There's a difference between telling lies and not divulging all the details. Not divulging all the details, for example about your friendships before marriage, is not wrong and is a very wise thing to do. The spouse has no need to know and it is something that does no good to the marriage no matter how 'broadminded' the spouse may be. But to tell a lie is wrong and goes against the grain of all that I have said above. Incidentally 'white lies' is a racially color biased term, like 'black sheep', 'nightmare', 'black heart' and so on; the legacy of English which is originally the white man's language. Knight in shining armor can be all black too - black shines even more than white if you notice.

Having said that, telling 'the truth' inappropriately or in a harsh manner does no good either. Being silent is an option that is worth exploring. For example if the toast is burnt or the food has no salt or something is not to your liking there are many ways of saying it. But you also have the option of remaining silent in honor of all the times that it was delicious. If the husband comes home cranky it is irritating but you have the option to remind yourself that a nice cup of tea and talking about something else is probably more productive than saying, 'Don't bring your office home.' You would be justified in saying so if you did, but sometimes it is better to be kind than to be justified. Diplomacy and wisdom are great virtues and most useful in a marriage. Not rubbing their nose in it is wise. Turn away gracefully. Don't watch their discomfiture. Spouses realize that they are wrong but may not necessarily grovel at your feet

and beg forgiveness. It is wise to leave them alone and not demand groveling. People's dignity is important to maintain. Be it a management - union negotiation or a domestic disagreement, it is important to allow the one who is wrong to 'save face'. To insist on humiliating them is to burn bridges to future relationship. Remember that you are also human and will surely be wrong one day. Don't create a situation where the other is waiting for that day to return your favor.

20. **Does it help couples when they talk about their problems to a stranger or someone they know?**

It is helpful for couples to talk about their problems to someone they respect and whose advice they are willing to listen to. Usually it is better to talk to strangers as they are perceived to be fairer and more objective, as they don't know either party but really it doesn't matter as long as it is someone you respect and who you have decided to listen to, meaning to obey his or her advice. As I have said earlier, before you go to talk to anyone, decide if you are going to listen to what they say even if they don't agree with you. If you are going to someone with the expectation that they must agree with you and support your stance no matter what it is, then don't waste your and their time. No self-respecting, honest arbitrator with any dignity will agree to be biased in favor of one party or the other. If they do, then they are not fit for the position.

In conclusion I would like to say that a marriage can be as good or as bad as you would like to make it. Believe it or not, it is actually possible to fall in love afresh every morning. As for your unasked question, 'All this is good. But surely there must

have been something negative.' My answer, 'If you had to choose between keeping roses and garbage, which would you choose?'

Remember what I said about memories earlier? We get to keep those we want to remember. Having said that, the truth is that at least for me, there are none that are negative.

And Allahﷻ knows that is true.

It is literally in your own hands.

About the Author

Mirza Yawar Baig, founder of **YAWAR BAIG & ASSOCIATES™**. International Speaker, Author, Life Coach, Corporate Consultant, specializing in Leadership Development helping technical specialists transition into Management and Leadership roles. He believes that we need to learn to take charge of our own destinies and not wait for others to decide how we should live. He draws on his extensive experience of over 28 years in consulting with Multinational Corporations, Government and business entrepreneurs on 3 continents where he's taught more than 200,000 managers, administrators, teachers, technologists and clergy on 3 continents. He combines Eastern values with Western systems to transcend cultural boundaries. Yawar's style reflects openness, commitment to quality and value-based professionalism. Yawar speaks five languages. He writes blogs, articles and books focusing on applying learning to create models of excellence.

One of the characteristics of modern life seems to be a breakdown of family life, the foundation of which is a happy and healthy marriage. This has vast implications on individuals and society in terms of hardship, lack of social concern and responsibility and a culture that promotes selfishness and self-satisfaction at all costs. This vicious circle propagates more destruction of marriages and the sad story grows. This short booklet is an attempt to share my learning and understanding of the main issues in a marriage and a look at what it takes to make a marriage a source of great joy and fulfillment in this life. I hope that those who read it will benefit from it and will live happy, productive and satisfactory lives. The book is focused at Muslims but others can also benefit.

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